

The Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art Presents *In Her Image: Photographs by Rania Matar*

News Release

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Large-scale color photographs examine the commonalities of female identity in the US and Lebanon

Cleveland, OH (October 15, 2018) – *In Her Image: Photographs by Rania Matar* features 43 large-scale color images by American photographer Rania Matar. In four different series, Matar uses portraiture to examine the nature of female identity in girlhood, adolescence, and middle age in the United States and Lebanon. The photographs address her subjects' identities, but also reflect her own experiences as a woman of Palestinian origin born and raised in Lebanon. ***In Her Image: Photographs by Rania Matar*** opens at Transformer Station on Friday, October 26, with a free reception from 6:00–8:00 p.m. The exhibition will be on view through Sunday, January 13, 2019.

"Rania Matar is an award-winning artist whose work has been exhibited widely in the US and internationally," said William Griswold, director of the Cleveland Museum of Art. "Visitors have an opportunity to immerse themselves in the artist's monumental photographs, which explore female identity and the artist's own cross-cultural experience as a Lebanese-born American woman and mother."

Matar began photographing her children when she became a parent, but the tragedy of the 9/11 attacks led her to focus on using the medium to tell others' stories. "It seemed that the world had become divided into Them/Us," recalled the artist. "I wanted to tell a different story of the Middle East." Her first visit to a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon in 2002 provided additional motivation; she felt a strong and immediate connection with the women, especially the mothers.

"Matar is a masterful portraitist who, by focusing on the individual, reveals truths about the universal experience of what it means to be female," said Barbara Tannenbaum, chair of prints, drawings, and photographs, and curator of photography. "She establishes a strong and intimate bond with her sitters as she explores the transitions from girlhood through puberty to womanhood and middle age."

Created between 2009 and 2016, the four series on view: ***L'Enfant-Femme***, ***Becoming***, ***A Girl and Her Room***, and ***Unspoken Conversations*** contain examples from both American and Lebanese cultures. The location of each photograph is not always evident, a fact that reflects the influence of Western culture on the Middle East, and the artist's desire to focus on "the commonalities that make us human, to emphasize underlying similarities rather than apparent differences across cultures."

About the Four Series

L'Enfant-Femme



Clara 8, Beirut, Lebanon, from the series *L'Enfant-Femme*, 2012. Rania Matar (American, born 1964). Inkjet print; 28.8 x 36 in. Courtesy of the artist and Robert Klein Gallery

L'Enfant-Femme (2011–16) was inspired by the artist's 13-year-old daughter, who was rapidly growing out of girlhood. *L'Enfant-Femme* is a French expression for that fleeting preteen and early teen stage when a girl starts to become a woman. Nowadays, girls this age have been raised on selfies; they are accustomed to being photographed and immediately seeing the result. Matar denied them this instant feedback by shooting with a medium-format film camera. "I also asked them not to give me the 'selfie' smile, so they have to think about how to pose," says the artist. Some girls instinctively adopted

stereotypical seductive postures, echoing the sexualized images of women that abound in the mass media, while others display what the artist has termed “a beautiful awkwardness.”

Becoming



Lavinia 13, Brookline, Massachusetts, from the series *Becoming*, 2015. Rania Matar (American, born 1964). Inkjet print; 24 x 19.2 in. Courtesy of the artist and Robert Klein Gallery

Becoming is a continuation of *L'Enfant-Femme*. Matar returned between two and five years later to photograph some of the same young women, often in the same location. In these pairs of photographs, we see tweens become teens as Matar explores the passage of time and the physical and psychological transformations that are part of growth and maturation. “It is touching and

endearing,” she has noted, “to observe the subtle changes in body language, hand gestures, feet positions, and attitude in these photographs.”

A Girl and Her Room



Christilla, Rabieh, Lebanon, from the series *A Girl and Her Room*, 2010. Rania Matar (American, born 1964). Inkjet print; 28 x 42 in. Courtesy of the artist and Robert Klein Gallery

Photographing her teenage daughters with their girlfriends, Matar discovered “how aware they were of each other’s presence, and how much the group affected the identity they were portraying to the world.” For the series *A Girl and Her Room*, she decided to photograph each young woman alone “in the personal space she was curating for herself, where she was exploring her own sense of identity.” While each teen is a unique individual, the artist observed that “there’s something very universal about being a teenage girl, whether it’s in Lebanon, in a Palestinian refugee camp, or in Boston. They are all going through that same transition and turning into adults. They might be dealing with it in different ways, but they’re all dealing with it.”

Unspoken Conversations



Leila and Souraya, Jounieh, Lebanon, from the series *Unspoken Conversations*, 2015. Rania Matar (American, born 1964). Inkjet print; 28.8 x 36 in. Courtesy of the artist and Robert Klein Gallery

Unspoken Conversations juxtaposes adolescent daughters and their middle-aged mothers to convey the complexity and universality of the mother-daughter relationship. Matar began these dual portraits of mothers and daughters when her eldest daughter left for college in 2013. “I realized that as she was growing up, I was getting older, but also that my role as a mother was about to change,” recalls Matar. “Like the rest of my work, I am exploring through my photography what I find myself and my daughters going through. Observing mothers and daughters together seemed to me to offer versions of the same person separated by the years.”

Transformer Station is located at 1460 West 29th Street, Cleveland, OH 44113

Hours: Wed/Sat/Sun 11:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; Thu 11:00 a.m.–8:00 p.m.; Closed Mon/Tue

Opening Reception: *In Her Image: Photographs by Rania Matar*

Friday, October 26, 6:00–8:00 p.m., Free

Transformer Station

In Her Image: Photographs by Rania Matar was organized by the Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

Programming

From Girlhood to Womanhood: A Panel Discussion with Rania Matar

Friday, November 16, 7:00–9:00 p.m., Free

Transformer Station

Limited ticket availability. Please call 216-421-7350 to make reservations

In Her Image: Photographs by Rania Matar surveys four different series by the artist. *L'Enfant-Femme* explores how girls on the cusp of puberty often adopt stereotypical personas derived from mass media when posing for the camera. The *Becoming* series re-photographs some of those girls several years later to chronicle their transition to womanhood. *A Girl and Her Room* portrays teens in their bedrooms, the personal space that best reflect their inner selves. And finally, the *Unspoken Conversations* series juxtaposes adolescent daughters and their middle-aged mothers to convey the complexity and universality of the mother-daughter relationship. Come to Transformer Station for an intimate discussion with the artist and local thought leaders to explore the complexities and universality of the mother-daughter relationship and womanhood. Featuring gallery activities and art-making experiences inspired by the artist, designed by the CMA Teen CO-OP.

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About the Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art is renowned for the quality and breadth of its collection, which includes more than 63,000 artworks and spans 6,000 years of achievement in the arts. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship and performing arts and is a leader in digital innovations. One of the top comprehensive art museums in the nation, recognized for its award-winning Open Access program and free of charge to all, the Cleveland Museum of Art is located in the University Circle neighborhood.

The museum is supported in part by residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture and made possible in part by the Ohio Arts Council (OAC), which receives support from the State of Ohio and the National Endowment for the Arts. The OAC is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally and economically. For more information about the museum and its holdings, programs and events, call 888-CMA-0033 or visit [cma.org](https://www.cma.org) [1].

Press Announcements [2]

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